THE SWORD INTERVAL

BY BEN FLEUTER

Damnit! What do you think you're doing?!
She's just lonely! She didn't do anything wrong!

Didn't do anything--

Half the town's wrecked, boy. People're hurt ***bad***. Your friend? She's a blight. Always has been.

Lawkeeper. The accord.
You shut it! We ain't never made a deal with monsters!

That's not true.

Saw a scroll tube just like this in your town archives. It was empty.
This one, though...

...So they can write. Doesn't make it *true*.
Sheriff...

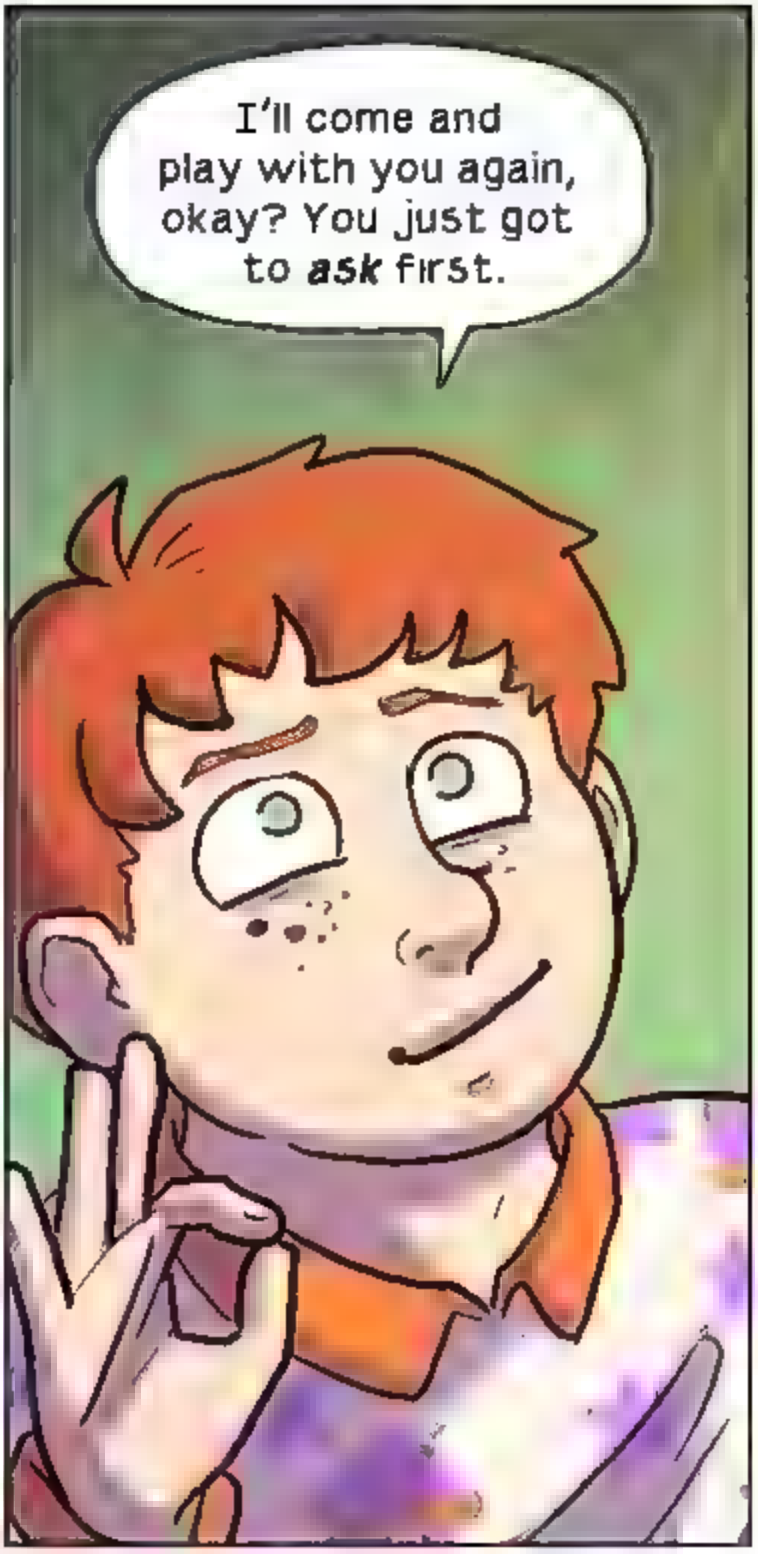
Chloe, the fae wouldn't fake a contract. Now, I can divine it's authenticity for the records, but the hunter has a point.
This a spell? You're on her side now? Both of you?

Oh, no no, not quite!
You're the law here. Slough is a child-snatching monster.

...You call the shot, Clark, just be sure it's one you can live with.

Maybe there's a way we can make a... a new compact.
Ya'll stick to your swamps and we leave ya be. We ignore each other.
We both take time to heal.
Heal.

Well, I'm not satisfied with that. You had no rights to Phineus. One day I will call on you for a favor, Grandmother Slough.
It's uh, *really* not okay to steal kids, okay? That's not how you make friends.
Not. Friends?

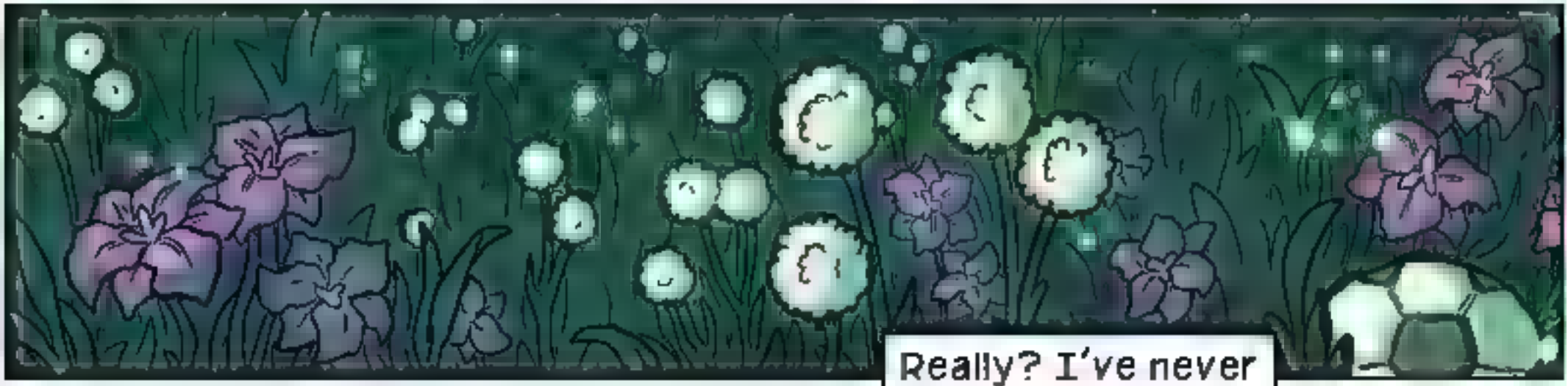

I'll come and play with you again, okay? You just got to ask first.

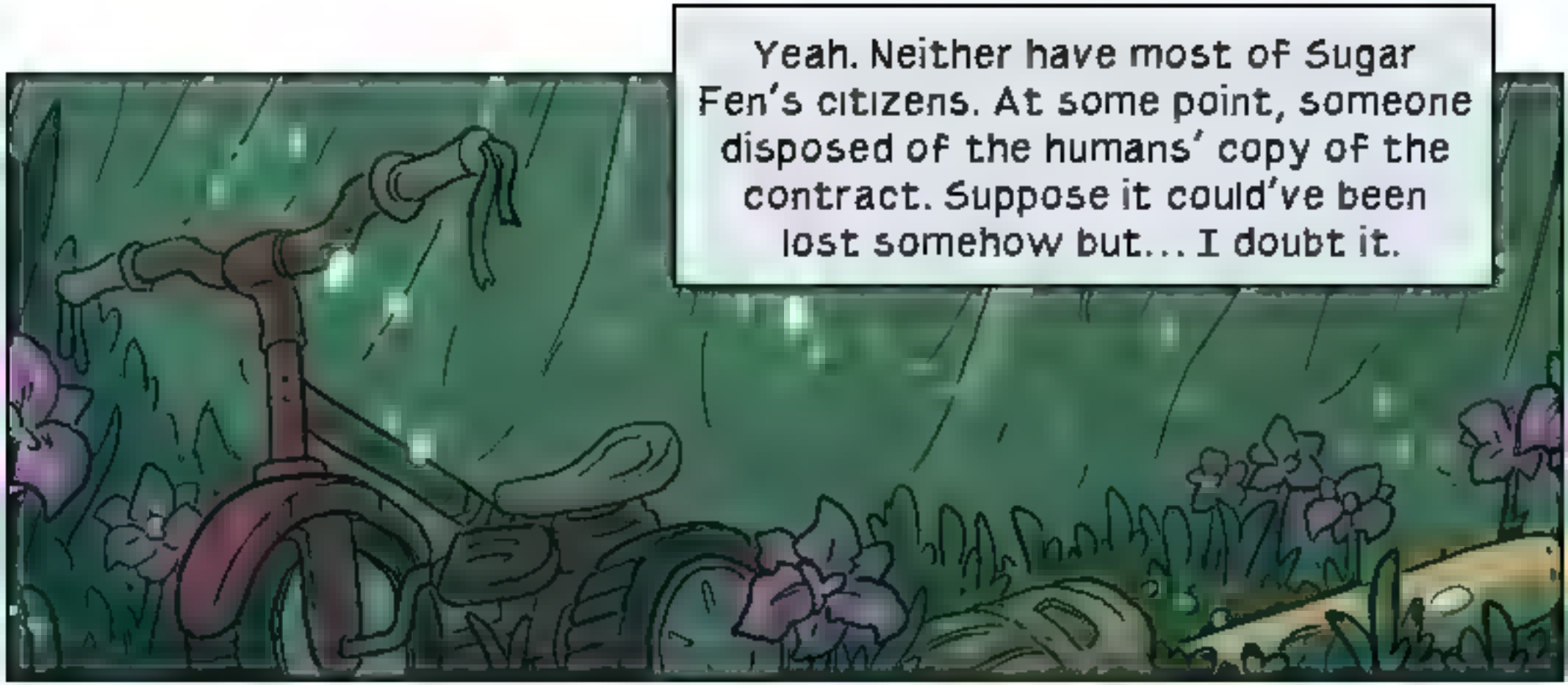
...
Two favors, then.

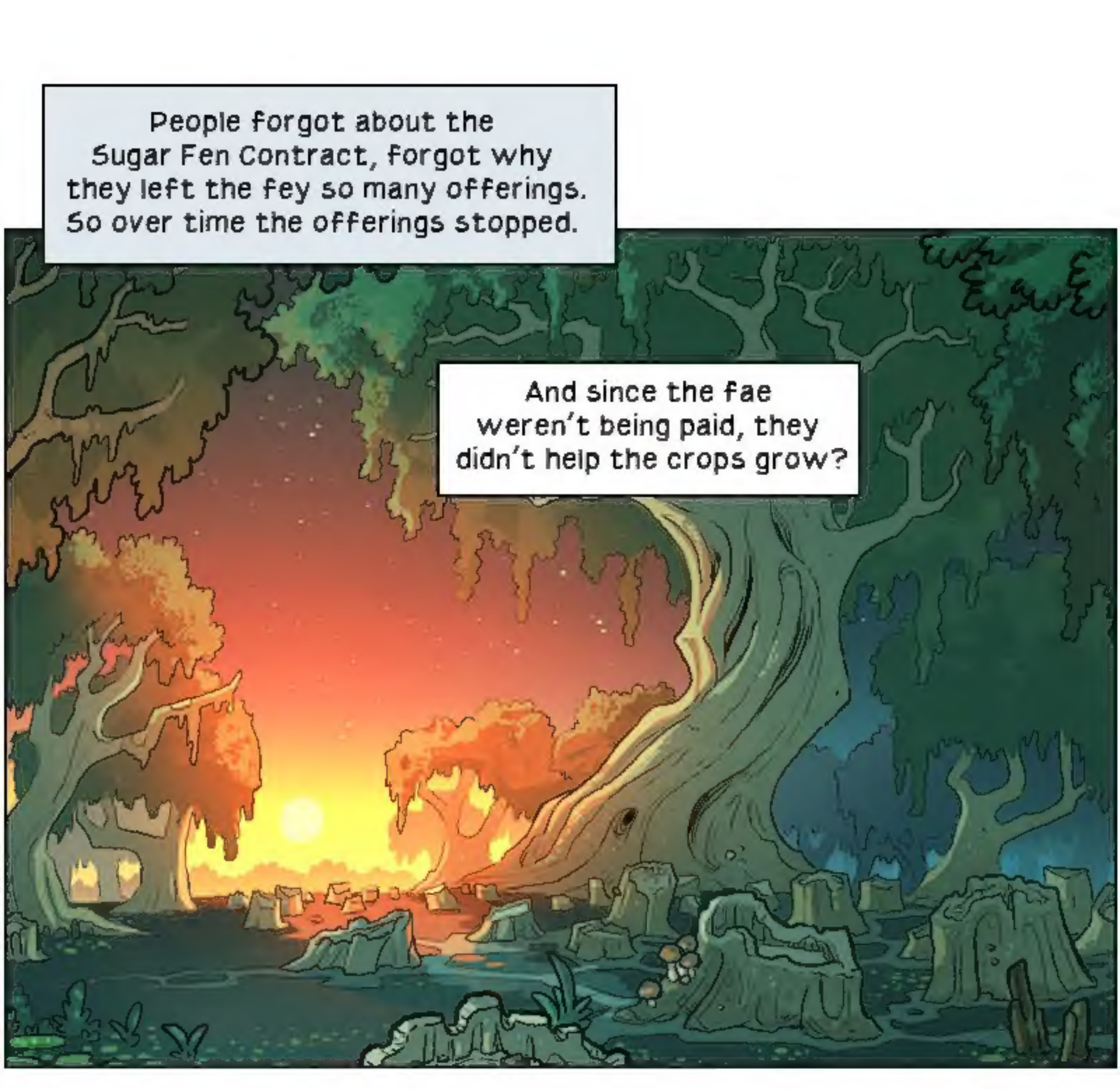
Hey.
Uh. H-hi.
Hm?

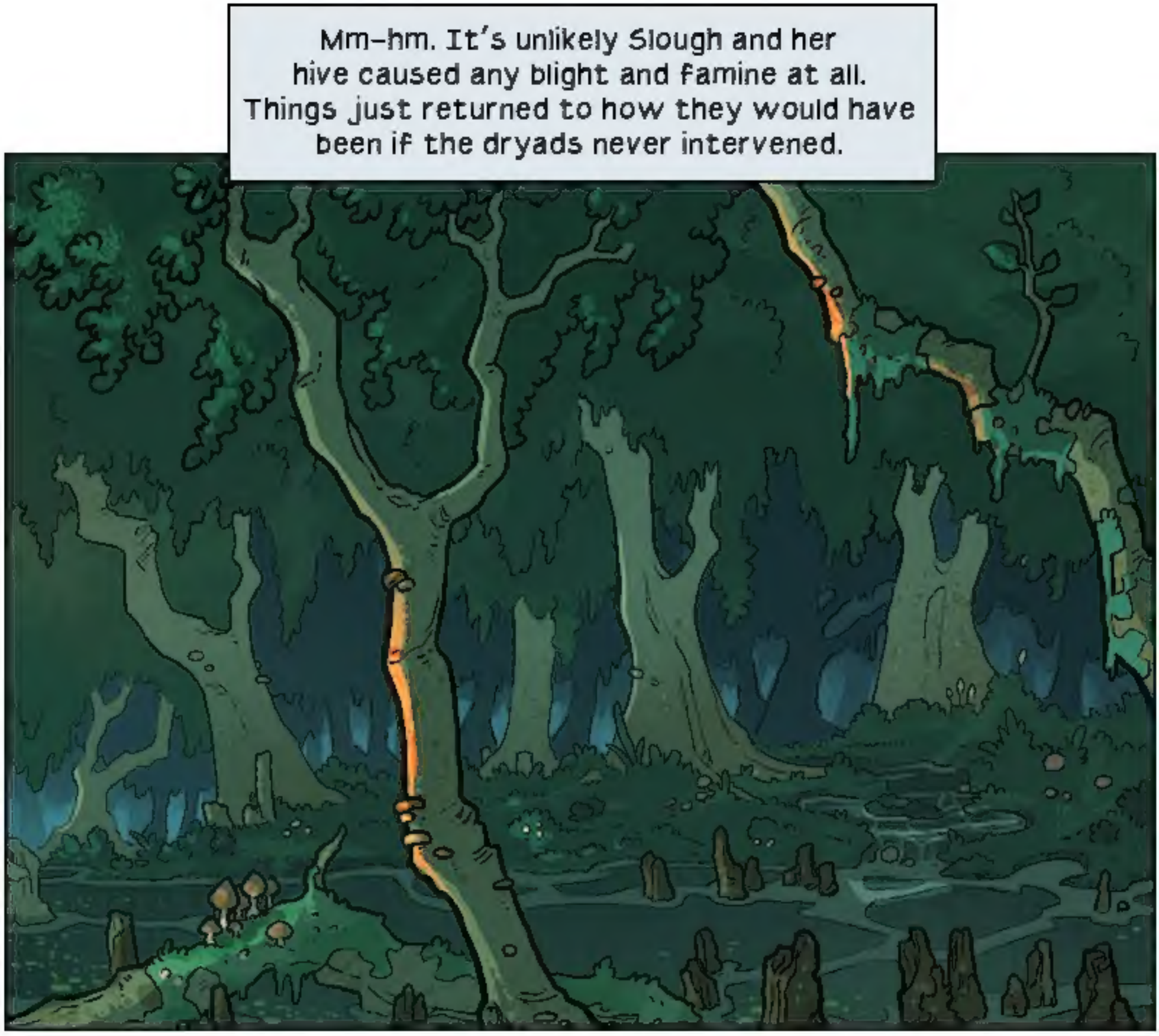
What uh... what was on the contract? What made the sheriff change her mind?
Ah. Well...

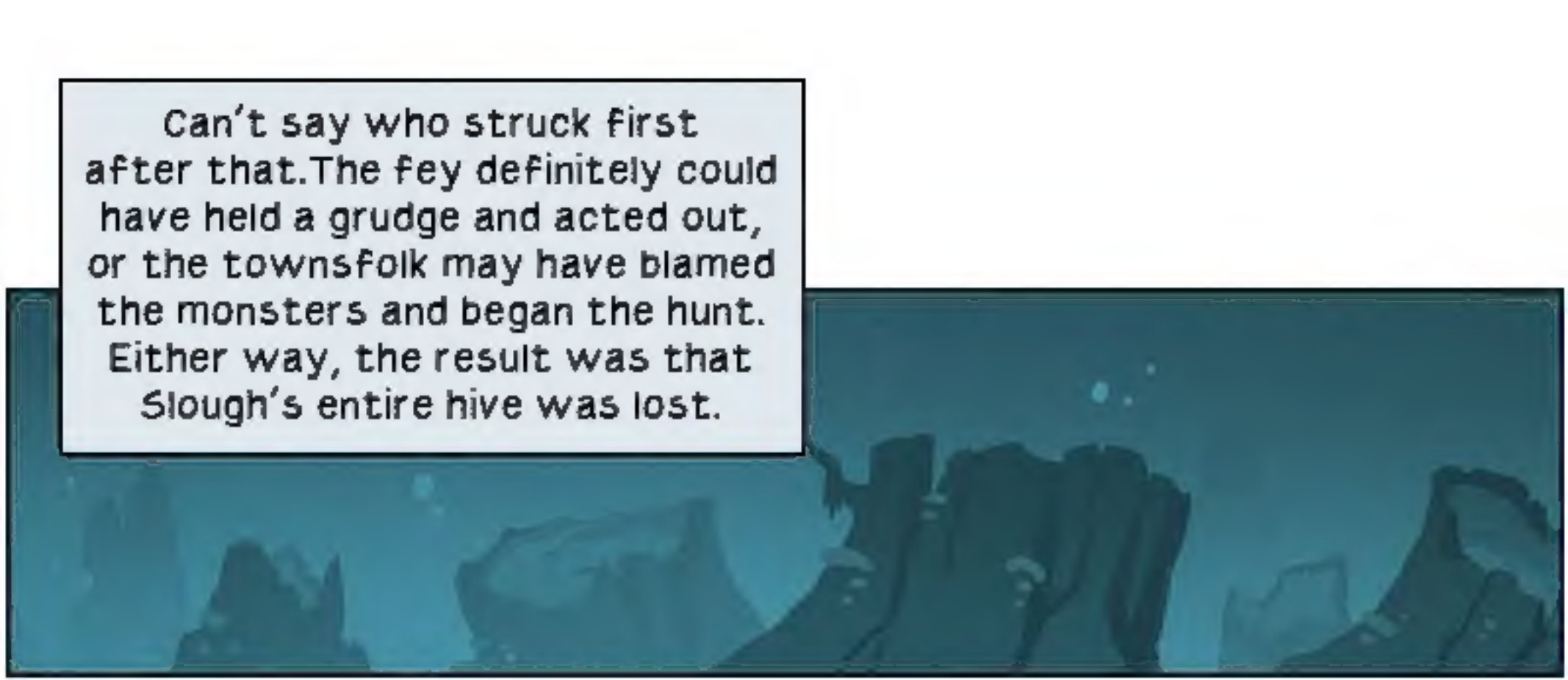
Far as I can figure, the dryads had helped Sugar Fen's crops grow for over two hundred years. In exchange, the town gave the fae a significant share of the harvest, particularly the processed sugar.




Yeah. Neither have most of Sugar Fen's citizens. At some point, someone disposed of the humans' copy of the contract. Suppose it could've been lost somehow but... I doubt it.


People forgot about the Sugar Fen Contract, forgot why they left the fey so many offerings. So over time the offerings stopped.
And since the fae weren't being paid, they didn't help the crops grow?


Mm-hm. It's unlikely Slough and her hive caused any blight and famine at all. Things just returned to how they would have been if the dryads never intervened.


Can't say who struck first after that.The fey definitely could have held a grudge and acted out, or the townsfolk may have blamed the monsters and began the hunt. Either way, the result was that Slough's entire hive was lost.

Hundreds of years or more in a hive-mind – hearing the voices of her kin in her head – and then over a few short, violent weeks...
Silence.